

Worth, Texas, back in my home district. One year ago when I was in Iraq, Ramadi was held by insurgent representatives of al Qaeda. In July of 2006, there would have been no way for a congressional delegation to travel to this city as it would have been seen as too dangerous a mission.

But things began to change last February. The historic tribal leaders began to clearly understand that life alongside al Qaeda was not going to improve; and in a stunning reversal, the town's leaders began to seek out and embrace American protection. Popular support was now no longer available to al Qaeda in a city that had been destined to be the provincial capital of the resurgent Caliphate. This represented a striking strategic failure for the enemy. Their shadow government which had intended to establish a capital of a radical Islamic state was forced out of the city, and, indeed, subsequent armed attempts to retake control were successfully repelled. People in town began identifying where the terrorists lived, who was making the bombs, who was putting the city and their daily lives in jeopardy.

Now, the task of rebuilding a civil society, the municipal government has certainly significant tasks ahead of it. And, Madam Speaker, I might add to that it was the additional soldiers and marines provided by what is called the surge last February, particularly the soldiers of the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Unit force just north of al-Anbar, that made a lot of this possible. They intercepted the vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices as they were on their way down to Ramadi; they found the factories where these were manufactured, and were able to provide additional breathing space and additional room as the city was recon- trolled by the Americans.

Because of the distance from Baghdad and the central government, there has been some isolation, and significant efforts have been made by the Army to ensure that the local mayor has the ability to provide for his citizens. And this, Madam Speaker, underscores one of the real difficulties ahead for this country. As areas are reclaimed and stabilized, the central government must be able to quickly provide the financial and security support that will be required to sustain this early success.

This also underscores one of the important recognized benchmarks, that of holding the provincial elections. During the electoral process 2 years ago, most of the Sunni population was involved in an electoral boycott. Now they see the fundamental error of that decision, and they are eager to see new elections that would permit a more popular representation.

After 2 or 3 years of serious brutality at the hands of al Qaeda, the population now sees America as helpers and sees Americans as protectors. The tribal leaders had originally feared that Americans were occupiers, that they

would stay forever, but now they have come to understand that the Americans have no such interests. The same could not be said for al Qaeda's interests. Their clear intent was to hold the town for their purposes for the foreseeable future.

The point was made during our visit that there are no overnight solutions to the problems in Iraq. Leadership cannot be bought, and this has to be an evolutionary change. But this change can occur if the correct environment is provided.

As if to underscore the recent success in Ramadi, we were taken out of the military base, down the main street of town, right into the marketplace. We were permitted to walk freely in the marketplace and observed many of the items for sale in what appears to be a very normal Arab market.

Madam Speaker, I did provide a photograph from that visit, and here you can see again one of the stalls of the market. You can see the goods for sale, the pots and pans up there, coolers for water or whatever other beverage one might want to have. You can see the smiles on the young children. They didn't know we were going to come to town that day; it just happened that we showed up, and they were apparently glad to see us. You see the men there bargaining in the background. It doesn't really look like a street scene of people that are under great stress or duress. It looks like a normal marketplace with normal people doing normal Saturday-morning activities.

The vehicle you see just a portion up here at the edge of the photograph was actually a municipal vehicle, a city vehicle. They were repairing one of the sewer lines in the street. Many of the sewer lines and water lines in this town had been broken by improvised explosive devices that had gone off during the more active and kinetic phases of the retaking of the city from the al Qaeda groups. But it wasn't Americans who were out repairing the sewer pipe, it was actually the municipal government of the city of Ramadi who was taking care of that task, as they should, as is appropriate for a municipal government, the appropriate way for a municipal government to behave.

I would also point out some of the clothing that is for sale.

Madam Speaker, I just have to say in this trip to Iraq one of the things I saw that really struck me as being significantly different from other trips, not just in Ramadi, but in Baghdad and some of the other areas we visited, many more women were in evidence out on the streets and out in public, significantly different from other times when I have been there. And I take that as a good sign, a good sign as for the resurgence of civil society.

But there is pretty striking evidence of the prior combat in the town all around us. But the evidence of active reconstruction and a crew working on the sewer line in the middle of the street as we walked through town real-

ly again gave me some hope that there was some stability for these young children.

And let me talk about the future for a moment. That is a future that these young men now have that actually was going to be denied to them just a few short months ago. And, again, you can see the look of curiosity on these boys' faces. This boy is not quite sure whether to smile or run away. But, nevertheless, these kids were all over in the marketplace.

And you see back there again some of the brightly colored glass and things that weren't for sale in the market. I don't know where these shirts came from; presumably that represents some sort of local sports team. But, again, a very different scene in Ramadi today than would have been evident a year ago.

When I returned yesterday, one of the things that I encounter in the headline in the Washington Times was also of encouragement to me. We had spent some time during the trip on Saturday at a place called Camp Taji, which is north of Iraq.

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Camp Taji is where a good number of our soldiers are stationed, a lot of our National Guardsmen are stationed. And again, Camp Taji, the same situation: they've moved soldiers out the relatively large base. They've moved out to work with the Iraqi units, to work in the towns. And one of the things we learned on that trip through there this weekend, the commander told us that there had just been a meeting with 150 sheiks, both Sunni and Shia, and the reason for the meeting, the meeting was called by the sheiks. They wanted to meet with the American military, and the reason for that meeting was they wanted this same type of success for their communities. They wanted to ask if the same type of return to civil society that is going on, that's breaking out in the country of Ramadi, they wanted to know if it was possible in their communities. And, again, not just Sunni leaders, Shia leaders as well.

And I'll quote from yesterday's, this is the Washington Times from Monday, July 23, 2007. And it says: "U.S. forces have brokered an agreement between Sunni and Shia tribal leaders to join forces against al Qaeda and other extremists extending a policy that has transformed the security situation in western Anbar province, and they wanted to extend that to this area north of the capital."

A startling story. We just heard about this on Saturday when we were there. In fact, I was kind of given the impression that it was so new that maybe we shouldn't talk about it. But here it is on the front page of the Washington Times, so I'm going to assume it is okay to bring that up. Very significant because, of course, in the Sunni areas of Iraq, al Qaeda's dominant. In the Shia areas the Mahdi